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ABSTRACT

Enhanced cooperation in vocational education and training (VET) will be an important contribution toward ensuring a successful enlargement of the European Union. The social partners play an indispensable role in development, validation, and recognition of vocational competencies and qualifications at all levels and are partners in promotion of enhanced cooperation in this area. These main priorities will be pursued through enhanced cooperation in VET: European dimension; transparency, information, and guidance; recognition of competencies and qualifications; and quality assurance. These principles will underpin enhanced cooperation in VET: measures should be voluntary and principally developed through bottom-up cooperation; initiatives must focus on needs of citizens and user organization; and cooperation should be inclusive and involve member states, candidate countries, and the social partners. Follow up of this declaration will include the following to ensure effective and successful implementation of enhanced European cooperation in VET: implementation of enhanced cooperation in VET will be a gradually integrated part of followup of the objectives report; the existing commission working group will continue work to ensure effective implementation and coordination; and the initial focus between now and 2004 will be on concrete areas where work is already in progress. (YLB)

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"The Copenhagen Declaration"

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"The Copenhagen Declaration"

Over the years co-operation at European level within education and training has come to play a decisive role in creating the future European society.

Economic and social developments in Europe over the last decade have increasingly underlined the need for a European dimension to education and training. Furthermore, the transition towards a knowledge based economy capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion brings new challenges to the development of human resources.

The enlargement of the European Union adds a new dimension and a number of challenges, opportunities and requirements to the work in the field of education and training. It is particularly important that acceding member states should be integrated as partners in future cooperation on education and training initiatives at European level from the very beginning.

The successive development of the European education and training programmes has been a key factor for improving cooperation at European level.

The Bologna declaration on higher education in June 1999 marked the introduction of a new enhanced European cooperation in this area.

The Lisbon European Council in March 2000 recognised the important role of education as an integral part of economic and social policies, as an instrument for strengthening Europe's competitive power worldwide, and as a guarantee for ensuring the cohesion of our societies and the full development of its citizens. The European Council set the strategic objective for the European Union to become the world's most dynamic knowledge-based economy. The development of high quality vocational education and training is a crucial and integral part of this strategy, notably in terms of promoting social inclusion, cohesion, mobility, employability and competitiveness.

The report on the 'Concrete Future Objectives of Education and Training Systems', endorsed by the Stockholm European Council in March 2001, identified new areas for joint actions at European level in order to achieve the goals set at the Lisbon European Council. These areas are based on the three strategic objectives of the report, i.e. improving the quality and effectiveness of education and training systems in the European Union, facilitating access for all to education and training systems, and opening up education and training systems to the wider world.

In Barcelona, in March 2002 the European Council endorsed the Work Programme on the follow-up of the Objectives Report calling for European education and training to become a world quality reference by 2010. Furthermore, it called for further action to introduce instruments to ensure the transparency of diplomas and qualifications, including promoting action similar to the Bologna-process, but adapted to the field of vocational education and training.

In response to the Barcelona mandate, the Council of the European Union (Education, Youth and Culture) adopted on 12 November 2002 a Resolution on enhanced cooperation in vocational education and training. This resolution invites the Member States, and the Commission, within the framework of their responsibilities, to involve the candidate countries and the EFTA-EEA countries, as well as the social partners, in promoting an increased cooperation in vocational education and training.

Strategies for lifelong learning and mobility are essential to promote employability, active citizenship, social inclusion and personal development[1]. Developing a knowledge based Europe and ensuring that the European labour market is open to all is a major challenge to the vocational educational and training systems in Europe and to all actors involved. The same is true of the need for these systems to continuously adapt to new developments and changing demands of society. An enhanced cooperation in vocational education and training will be an important contribution towards ensuring a successful enlargement of the European Union and fulfilling the objectives identified by the European Council in Lisbon. Cedefop and the European Training Foundation are important bodies for supporting this cooperation.

The vital role of the social partners in the socio-economic development is reflected both in the context of the European social dialogue and the European Social Partners framework of actions for the lifelong development of competences and qualifications, agreed in March 2002. The social partners play an indispensable role in the development, validation and recognition of vocational competences and qualifications at all levels and are partners in the promotion of an enhanced cooperation in this area.

The following main priorities will be pursued through enhanced cooperation in vocational education and training: [2]

On the basis of these priorities we aim to increase voluntary cooperation in vocational education and training, in order to promote mutual trust, transparency and recognition of competences and qualifications, and thereby establishing a basis for increasing mobility and facilitating access to lifelong learning.

European dimension

- Strengthening the European dimension in vocational education and training with the aim of improving closer cooperation in order to facilitate and promote mobility and the development of inter-institutional cooperation, partnerships and other transnational initiatives, all in order to raise the profile of the European education and training area in an international context so that Europe will be recognised as a world-wide reference for learners.

Transparency, information and guidance

- Increasing transparency in vocational education and training through the implementation and rationalization of information tools and networks, including the integration of existing instruments such as the European CV, certificate and diploma supplements, the Common European framework of reference for languages and the EUROPASS into one single framework.

- Strengthening policies, systems and practices that support information, guidance and counselling in the Member States, at all levels of education, training and employment, particularly on issues concerning access to learning, vocational education and training, and the transferability and recognition of competences and qualifications, in order to support occupational and geographical mobility of citizens in Europe.

Recognition of competences and qualifications

- Investigating how transparency, comparability, transferability and recognition of competences and/or qualifications, between different countries and at different levels, could be promoted by developing reference levels, common principles for certification, and common measures, including a credit transfer system for vocational education and training.

- Increasing support to the development of competences and qualifications at sectoral level, by reinforcing cooperation and co-ordination especially involving the social partners. Several initiatives on a Community, bilateral and multilateral basis, including those already identified in various sectors aiming at mutually recognised qualifications, illustrate this approach.

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[1] Priorities identified in the Resolution on lifelong learning adopted by the Council of the European Union (Education and Youth) on 27 June 2002

[2] Priorities identified in the Resolution on the promotion of enhanced European co-operation on vocational education and training approved by the Council of the European Union (Education, Youth and Culture) on 12 November 2002

- Developing a set of common principles regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning with the aim of ensuring greater compatibility between approaches in different countries and at different levels.

Quality assurance

- Promoting cooperation in quality assurance with particular focus on exchange of models and methods, as well as common criteria and principles for quality in vocational education and training.

- Giving attention to the learning needs of teachers and trainers within all forms of vocational education and training.

The following principles will underpin enhanced cooperation in vocational education and training:

- Cooperation should be based on the target of 2010, set by the European Council in accordance with the detailed work programme and the follow-up of the Objectives report in order to ensure coherence with the objectives set by the Council of the European Union (Education, Youth and Culture).

- Measures should be voluntary and principally developed through bottom-up cooperation.

- Initiatives must be focused on the needs of citizens and user organisations.

- Cooperation should be inclusive and involve Member States, the Commission, candidate countries, EFTA-EEA countries and the social partners.

The follow-up of this declaration should be pursued as follows to ensure an effective and successful implementation of an enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training:

1. Implementation of the enhanced cooperation in vocational education and training shall be a gradually integrated part of the follow-up of the objectives report. The Commission will reflect this integrated approach in its reporting to the Council of the European Union (Education, Youth and Culture) within the timetable already decided for the work of the objectives report. The ambition is to fully integrate the follow-up work of the enhanced co-operation in vocational education and training in the follow-up of the objectives report.

2. The existing Commission working group, which will be given a similar status to that of the working groups within the follow-up of the objectives report, in future including Member States, EFTA-EEA countries, candidate countries and the European social partners, will continue to work in order to ensure effective implementation and coordination of the enhanced cooperation in vocational education and training. The informal meetings of the Directors General for Vocational Training, which contributed to launching this initiative in Bruges 2001, will play an important role in focusing and animating the follow-up work.

3. Within this framework the initial focus between now and 2004 will be on concrete areas where work is already in progress, i.e. development of a single transparency framework, credit transfer in vocational education and training and development of quality tools. Other areas, which will be immediately included as a fully integrated part of the work of the follow-up of the objectives report organised in eight working groups and an indicator group, will be lifelong guidance, non-formal learning and training of teachers and trainers in vocational education and training. The Commission will include progress on these actions in its report mentioned in paragraph 1.

The ministers responsible for vocational education and training and the European Commission have confirmed the necessity to undertake the objectives and priorities for actions set out in this declaration and to participate in the framework for an enhanced cooperation in vocational education and training, including the social partners. A meeting in two years time will be held to review progress and give advice on priorities and strategies.

The Copenhagen Declaration was adopted 30 November 2002 by the following European Countries and the EU Commission:

Austria, Belgium (French community), Belgium (Flemish community), Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, United Kingdom and the European Commission.

The Declaration was furthermore endorsed by the following social partners at European level:
The European Center of Enterprises with Public Participation and of Enterprises of General Economic Interest (CEEP), the Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe (UNICE) and the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC).

The following observers were present:
The European Center for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), the European Training Foundation (ETF), The European Parliament and The European Union Council Secretariat.

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